



AOT in Action

Welcome to AOT in Action, your weekly e-newsletter from the Arizona Office of Tourism (AOT).

A Message from Director Margie A. Emmermann:

Good morning,

This is a historic week for America *and* Arizona.

Today, President-elect Barack Obama will be inaugurated as the 44th President of the United States. Among his cabinet members awaiting confirmation is Arizona's own Governor, Janet Napolitano, who is expected to lead the Department of Homeland Security.

As a strong proponent of Arizona's tourism industry, Governor Napolitano actively promoted Arizona as a vacation destination by touting the Grand Canyon State's outdoor adventures and rich culture and heritage. At the Office of Tourism, we are grateful to her for being an advocate for our industry, and recognizing tourism as an important contributor to Arizona's economy.

With the anticipation of Governor Napolitano's new position in Washington, D.C., we will also welcome Secretary of State Jan Brewer as Arizona's 22nd governor. Secretary Brewer has been active in state and county government for 26 years, serving as a member of the State House, the Senate and the Maricopa County Board of Supervisors.

As we make the transfer of authority in state government, we are encouraged by the continuation of strong leadership. We all recognize these are tough times, and there will be difficult decisions to make in the months ahead.

As the transition begins, and the Legislature continues its work on the budget deficit, the Office of Tourism will remain committed to leading the way of branding Arizona as a premier travel destination, and ensuring key stakeholders and elected officials understand the important contributions our industry makes to the economic vitality of Arizona.

Have a good week.

AOT News

Arizona Watchable Wildlife Tourism Association Launches New Web site

The Arizona Watchable Wildlife Tourism Association has launched its new website at www.azwatchablewildlife.org. This site provides the most comprehensive information about viewing wildlife during Arizona's different seasons, dates of events for nature-oriented programs, information about responsible wildlife viewing, news about recent sightings and your responsibilities as a wildlife viewer.

According to Watchable Wildlife President Bruce Taubert, "With the help of the Arizona Game and Fish Department, the Arizona Office of Tourism and the Arizona State Parks department as our partners, our organization can provide updated wildlife viewing information quickly and communicate with visitors. This website will be a new tool for both residents and tourists to get details needed to travel around the state and see wildlife."

For more information about the Arizona Watchable Wildlife Tourism Association go to www.azwatchablewildlife.org.

Flagstaff

More than just a pretty place...it's an experience!

Situated within reach of the largest contiguous Ponderosa Pine forests in the continental United States is the vibrant mountain town of Flagstaff, Arizona.

For years, Flagstaff has charmed millions of visitors to northern Arizona with its four-season climate, dramatic scenery and diverse culture.

As a vital gateway community to destinations such as the Grand Canyon National Park, Page and Monument Valley, Flagstaff has provided travelers with stunning views of mountain vistas, exceptional regional cuisines, and the rich culture and heritage of one of Arizona's most historic destinations. With the community's wide variety of shops, cafes, fine art galleries, lively microbreweries, and exciting outdoor adventures, visitors can have an exhilarating experience to remember.

Flagstaff is located in Coconino County which lies within the Northern region of the state. In 2007, this region hosted 4.4 million overnight domestic visitors. Those visitors directly spent \$920.7 million.

Flagstaff Major Attractions

The Arboretum at Flagstaff
Arizona Historical Society-Pioneer Museum
Arizona Snowbowl

Coconino Center for the Arts
Coconino National Forest
Continental Country Club
Flagstaff Nordic Center
Flagstaff Symphony Orchestra
Heritage Square
Lowell Observatory
Museum of Northern Arizona
Northern Arizona University
Northern Arizona University Art Museum
Riordan Mansion State Historic Park
Historic Route 66

Surrounding Destinations

Barringer (Meteor) Crater
Glen Canyon National Recreation Area
Grand Canyon National Park
Lake Powell
Oak Creek Canyon
Sunset Crater Volcano National Monument
Walnut Canyon National Monument
Wupatki National Monument

Events

From art festivals to music performances to museums to great regional cuisine...for more events visit... <http://www.arizonaguide.com/whats happening/EventListings.aspx>

Information

For research information on the Northern Region, visit
http://www.azot.gov/documents/2007_Northern_AZ_Regional_Report.pdf

For more information on Flagstaff, visit www.flagstaffarizona.org.

AOT Events

Toronto Golf Show Brochure Distribution Opportunity

AOT invites you to exhibit your brochures at the Toronto Star Golf & Travel Show in Toronto, Ontario, February 27 - March 1, 2009. This consumer show expects to attract more than 30,000 Canadian golfers during a three-day timeframe. The cost is \$250, plus shipping. Space is limited. If you are interested in sending your brochures, please contact Kristy Swanson at 602-364-3696 or via e-mail at kswanson@azot.gov.

Upcoming Events

Event – Seattle Sales Mission

Date – January 25-29

Location – Seattle, Washington

Event – Go West Summit

Date – January 26-29

Location – Albuquerque, New Mexico

Event – German Media Mission

Date – February 2-6

Location – Hamburg, Munich and Zurich

Industry News

New Visa Rules Begin Smoothly

New rules went into effect last week requiring people traveling to the U.S. under the Visa Waiver program to register online in advance, instead of filling out paper forms in flight or at the airport. The new program, designed to improve U.S. security, has been voluntary since August, but became mandatory. Travelers are being asked to fill out the forms at least 72 hours in advance of travel. There were no signs of confusion as the new system was implemented at London Heathrow's sprawling Terminal 5--departure point for many U.S.-bound flights. "I know about it because my travel agent told me, so I had already taken care of it online," said Jo English as she checked in for a business trip to Miami.

The rules cover the citizens of 34 countries--from nations in Europe and Asia, to Australia and New Zealand--who don't require a visa to enter the U.S. The Department of Homeland Security said it will take a reasonable approach to travelers who have not obtained an approved travel authorization, but warned that travelers without authorization risk being delayed or denied entry to the U.S. (AP; www.AtlantaJournal-Constitution.com; Page D7, Washington Post)

U.S. Travel Groups Concerned About New Rules

The U.S. Travel Association is concerned that the government's new Electronic System for Travel Authorization could get off to a rocky start if foreign travelers aren't aware of it. As noted above, ESTA went into effect on last week for inbound travelers from Visa Waiver countries. According to the U.S. Travel Association, formerly the Travel Industry Association, "poor implementation" of the program could be costly. It said two-thirds of U.S. overseas visitors come from the 34 Visa Waiver Program countries. U.S. Travel Association says a "sufficiently funded, robust communications campaign" is needed to make sure travelers understand it. U.S. Travel is distributing an online "toolkit" to members to "help communicate the new ESTA requirements and our industry's position." (www.TravelWeekly.com, 1/12; Special to TA)

Travel Industry Rallies to Stave Off Florida Budget Cuts

The U.S. Travel Association is calling on its members to help support Visit Florida in its efforts to avoid a massive cut in its promotion budget by the state Legislature. U.S. Travel President Roger Dow sent an e-mail message to association members Friday urging them to get involved and "do whatever is necessary to support efforts to maintain strong funding for the Visit Florida program." As reported earlier (TA, 1/8), state lawmakers were considering steep cuts to Visit

Florida to help avoid a budget deficit of at least \$2.3 billion. Visit Florida was facing closing its welcome centers and sharply curtailing television advertising if the budget is cut. A final decision on the proposed budget cuts is expected by Wednesday. (A TA Special Report; www.FloridaToday.com)

Trade Groups Offer Policy Agendas to Obama

The U.S. Travel Association and National Tour Association issued separate legislative and policy agendas for the incoming Obama administration on Wednesday. U.S. Travel, formerly the Travel Industry Association, held a media briefing in Washington to introduce its legislative and policy agenda, while NTA issued its recommendations from its headquarters in Lexington, Ky. Both groups are urging their proposals be included in President-elect Obama's economic stimulus programs. NTA called for providing federal grants for travel and tourism development at the regional, state and local levels, and additional funding for federal lands. U.S. Travel's recommendations include new funding for developing enhanced passenger screening technology to improve efficiency at Transportation Security Administration check points, and increased State Department staffing to reduce U.S. visa interview wait times to less than 30 days.

Both groups called for passage of the Travel Promotion Act of 2008 to promote international travel to the U.S. NTA repeated its call for the establishment of an Executive Office of Travel and Tourism in the White House. U.S. Travel also urged expansion of the Visa Waiver Program to key markets. U.S. Travel's policy agenda was presented by Roger Dow, president and CEO, national chair Caroline Beteta of the California Travel and Tourism Commission, and Jonathan Tisch, former chairman of the Travel Business Roundtable. The TBR and TIA merged on Jan. 1 to form the U.S. Travel Association. NTA's policy proposals were developed during an economic summit held in Washington earlier this month. (*A TA Special Report*)

Drop in Sky Harbor Traffic Puts Expansion in Holding Pattern

Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport expects 2008 passenger counts to be 5 percent lower than 2007 and is projecting a 9 percent drop for 2009 as the economy takes the wind out of travel and carriers trim flight schedules. All that puts a dent into some of the airport's expansion plans, including the \$548 million west terminal slated to replace Terminal 2. Deputy Aviation Director Tamie Fisher said expansion projects such as the west terminal, transportation infrastructure, and additional concourses and gates are based on growth and need. Fisher said the airport will base any expansion on requests from airlines for more space to handle their passenger loads, which she hopes will bounce back in 2010.

Sky Harbor officials hope to get a piece of the pending \$1 trillion federal stimulus package for infrastructure projects, including taxiway improvements and a people-mover that would connect with the Metro light rail at 44th and Washington streets. Construction of the people-mover has been spread out to reduce short-term costs, but stimulus money could fast-track the project, said Sky Harbor spokeswoman Julie Rodriguez. Current plans show the people-mover opening in 2013. Fisher said some construction projects are not being delayed, including the addition of security checkpoints in Terminal 4 and basic maintenance of structures and runways. Sky Harbor served 2.2 million fewer passengers during the first 11 months of 2008 than during the same period in 2007. More than 42 million passengers used Sky Harbor in 2007. Airlines also are planning to cut more domestic flights to help their bottom lines. US Airways, which has 264 daily departures from Phoenix to 84 cities, plans to discontinue up to 10 percent of its flights system-wide in 2009, said spokeswoman Valerie Wunder. Southwest Airlines, which has 184 daily Sky Harbor departures, is cutting single flights between Phoenix and Los Angeles; Boise, Idaho; St. Louis; Reno, Nev.; and San Antonio, Texas, but will add one daily flight to Denver. (*BizJournals.com/Phoenix, Jan. 15*)

Columnist: Travel Industry Sees a Friend in Obama

The swearing-in Tuesday of Barack Obama as the nation's 44th president will inspire hope and change across the country. And the sentiment won't be any less palpable among the big players in the tourism lobby, says Orlando Sentinel business columnist Beth Kassab. The U.S. Travel Association (formerly the Travel Industry Association) has complained for years that poor communication and less-than-polite treatment of foreign tourists as they enter the country, especially in the wake of 9/11, have depressed the number of visitors willing to travel to the United States.

But Geoff Freeman, the group's top lobbyist, said there have been "a lot of questions from the incoming administration, a lot of interest in what's working and what's not working" and other signals that travel policy is of interest to Obama's top staff. A good sign for the group is that Obama as well as incoming Secretary of State Hilary Clinton and his White House Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel were early co-sponsors of legislation that supported more tourism advertising and public relations abroad when the trio was in Congress last year, Freeman said. The association projects that the global recession will result in a 1.6 percent decline in international travel this year. (www.OrlandoSentinel.com/Business)

World is Hailing Safe Water Landing of US Airways Jet

People around the world are marveling at the US Airways pilots who executed a dramatic emergency landing Thursday on the Hudson River near midtown Manhattan, saving the lives of all 150 passengers and five crew members aboard Flight 1549. The Airbus A320 twin-engine jetliner--en route to Charlotte, N.C.--landed at 3:21 p.m. about five minutes after leaving LaGuardia Airport. The landing was the first time in 50 years of commercial jet travel that a large passenger aircraft made a water landing without fatalities, according to air-safety experts. Passengers and witnesses described a smooth landing on the Hudson and then a scramble for emergency exits that led out onto the wings.

Within minutes, ferry and tourist boats surrounded the aircraft as it floated in the 40-degree water. The U.S. Coast Guard dropped life vests while divers pulled passengers from the wing. An investigation into the cause of the crash will begin today. The crew reported flying through a flock of geese, sucking them into both engines. The damaged engines continued to run but weren't generating enough power, the FAA said. (AP; Pages A3, Wall Street Journal; A1, New York Times 1A, USA Today; A1, Washington Post; www.LosAngelesTimes.com)

The survival of everyone aboard the US Airways plane that landed in the Hudson River might seem like a miracle. But planes are designed to survive water landings, and a skilled crew can use those design elements to keep a ditched aircraft afloat and the passengers safe, according to Bill Waldock, a professor of safety science at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Prescott, Ariz. "You've heard of airworthiness," he said. "Planes are also designed for crash worthiness." Waldock, who is also a pilot and an aircraft accident investigator, said planes, like ships, will float "as long as you don't let the plane get full of water. It's the buoyancy provided by the air in the plane." The plane that went down Thursday was an Airbus 320, which has a low wing. This allowed most of the fuselage to remain above water, contributing to the aircraft's buoyancy, he said. (AP; www.LasVegasReview-Journal.com)

Arizona Salsa Trail Blazes to the Midwest

Salsa Trail mascot Señor Salsa is at it again — hot on the heels of those folks back East who don't know the difference between a jalapeño and a habañero. The Arizona Salsa Trail is featured

this month in an article called “Hot Stops” in seven AAA regional publications with a combined circulation of more than 2.4 million. The magazines are circulated in the Midwest, where cold temperatures and blowing snow are a staple in January and February.

“This particular article in AAA in the Midwest reaches the market the winter visitors come from,” said Bill Civish, chairman of the Graham County Visitor and Tourism Council.

This is not the first time the Salsa Trail has blazed its way across magazine and newspaper pages. This culinary tourism attraction has so far been a hot topic in up to 25 publications since its inception three years ago, said Sheldon Miller, director of the Graham County Chamber of Commerce. The “Hot Stops” article, written by Jackie Dishner, is peppered with references to several Mexican eateries along the Salsa Trail. Beginning with the San Simon Chile Company, Dishner describes the landscape of the area and the unique tastes of salsas offered at Salsa Trail restaurants.

For example, Dishner describes Pima as “a tiny town where cotton farms and alfalfa fields replace cactus and sage.” She also writes “Bush & Shurtz serves farmers who prefer their salsa creamy and mild, but in the next town over, Thatcher, La Casita Café makes a chunky, spicy salsa sold by the pint. It’s a tongue-burning, tear-jerking green concoction worth taking home.”

Dishner describes Safford as “the hub” of the Salsa Trail, and several restaurants, including Gi’mee’s in York and El Coronado in Safford, are mentioned. Civish said if Dishner’s article does not entice salsa connoisseurs to spend the winter in the Gila Valley, it might at least prompt a visit.

“We’ve had only positive comments from visitors and the press about the communities and the restaurants and the people,” Miller said.

As the chamber and the Visitor and Tourism Council await the arrival of “Arizona’s Salsa Trail,” a book by Christine Maxa featuring the Salsa Trail restaurants, recipes and places of interest, the new Salsa Kit has been introduced. The kit, in a bright red box, contains a cap, a T-shirt, pamphlets, a refrigerator magnet and, of course, a jar of salsa.

“We’ve put them in hotel rooms. We’ve given them to dignitaries. They’ve gone all over the country,” Miller said.

Meanwhile, Señor Salsa just keeps on blazing the trail, with the Gila Valley as the hot, saucy and sassy attraction for culinary tourists. *(By Diane Saunders, Eastern Arizona Courier, Published on Sunday, January 11, 2009 6:54 PM MST)*

Travel Industry Due for Restructuring in Coming Year

High debt repayment, reduced enterprise valuations, limited access to capital, and lower demand for products and services will force the travel industry to restructure itself in the coming year, asserts a new forecast from New York-based travel industry consultancy Hudson Crossing. "As in previous recessions, we fully expect that the current market will not support the breadth of travel firms that were created during the expansion cycle," Hudson Crossing Managing Partner Michael W. McCormick said in a statement. "We expect 2009 will bring consolidation and restructuring for the travel industry in most every sector."

Titled "Hudson Crossing 2009 Trends in Travel Investment," Hudson Crossing's report offers the following seven predictions for the U.S. travel industry, which it hopes will guide companies' business decisions in the New Year:

1. An OTA Will Change Hands: One major Online Travel Agency (OTA) will experience a change in ownership.
2. Luxury Brands Feel the Pinch: As affluent consumers are impacted by the nation's economic downturn, they'll be less willing to spend money on travel, hurting once immune luxury brands.
3. Venture Capital Stands Aside: Corporations, not venture capitalists, will lead travel industry investment activity.
4. U.S. Airlines Survive Subsidy-Free: Thanks to reduced capacity and lower fuel costs, U.S. airlines will stay afloat throughout the downturn without government support.
5. Hotel Industry Hit Late: The global hotel industry will feel the impact of the economic downturn in late 2009.
6. Online Advertising and Media See Growth: Online advertising and media will continue to thrive and attract short-term travel investment in spite of the economic downturn.
7. The Real Advent of Mobile Computing: Mobile computing in travel will skyrocket in 2009 thanks to the popularity of Apple's iPhone and BlackBerry's Storm.

Concluded McCormick, "A year of transformation does not equate to a year of failure in travel. Strong companies that embrace opportunities for change will emerge even stronger as they head into 2010 with perhaps even more customers, better products and fresh market strategy." To download Hudson Crossing's complete report, visit www.hudsoncrossing.com. (*TravelMole e-Newsletter*, January 14, 2009)

[Calendar of Events](#)

Visit www.ArizonaGuide.com to find information on all the exciting [events, festivals and activities](#) held throughout the Grand Canyon State!